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WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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- [1](#)1. Mideast
- [1](#)2. Iran: Nuclear Program

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Key stories in the media:  
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All media reported on, and Maariv bannered, an "inciting gathering" held last night in Jerusalem by the "hard-core, extremist opponents to disengagement" (according to Ha'aretz, members of the messianic faction of the Chabad-Lubavitch group), under the slogan: "Arik Sharon, you are bringing a holocaust upon us." A sign read: "Despite attempts to limit the quantity of weapons and ammo, each settlement has more weapons and ammo than the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto insurrection had." Aryeh Bibi, who led the police in the 1982 Yamit pullout, told Jerusalem Post: "The security forces need to prepare themselves for all worst-case scenarios that might erupt during the evacuation. The police have hard days before them and they had better prepare accordingly." Ha'aretz reported that Justice Minister Tzipi Livni will ask the cabinet at its weekly meeting on Sunday to establish a new unit in her ministry to deal with incitement, sedition, and violence related to the disengagement plan. Livni told Ha'aretz: "The threat is not confined to implementing the disengagement; the rule of law itself is now at stake." Hatzofe bannered: "Sharon's Dictatorship: Thought Police For 'War on Incitement.'"

Ha'aretz quoted Israeli defense sources as saying that the Palestinian security services have recently located and sealed 12 arms-smuggling tunnels along the Philadelphia route, on the Gazan-Egyptian border. The newspaper cites the IDF's satisfaction over the Palestinian efforts, which were ordered by PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas. Ha'aretz says that at the same time, however, the Palestinian successes have strengthened the long-standing opinion in Israel's defense establishment that the arms-smuggling tunnels depend on the PA's tacit cooperation for their existence. Israel Radio reported that eight Damascus-based leaders of Palestinian opposition factions have been invited to Cairo in early March. The radio quoted the head of Hamas' Damascus bureau, Musa Abu Marzouk as saying that the talks would center on the truce with Israel and on reforms in the Palestinian Authority. The radio quoted Hamas leader Hassan Yousef as saying that there would be no formal truce unless Israel frees more prisoners and pulls back more troops.

Israel Radio reported that this morning IDF forces captured three Palestinian activists who tried to infiltrate Israel from the Gaza Strip. One of them was wounded. The radio also reported that two mortar shells were launched at Israeli settlements.

Yediot reported that the IDF will replace reserve soldiers on guard duty at settlements with civilian guards.

Leading media (banner in Jerusalem Post) reported that President Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed on Thursday in Bratislava that Iran should not be permitted to obtain nuclear weapons and pledged to combat the proliferation of missile technology. However, the media note that the U.S. and Russia remain at odds over how to prevent Tehran from achieving nuclear weapons capability.

Yediot reported that Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali has invited Sharon to the World Summit on the Information Society, and that Sharon intends to accept the invitation. The newspaper reported that the first commercial flight from Israel to the Tunisian resort island of Jerba will take place in May.

All media reported that on Thursday, the Palestinian Legislative Council approved PM Ahmed Qurei's cabinet following a complicated, five-week-long process. Seventeen of the government's twenty-four members are new. Ha'aretz reported that FM Silvan Shalom praised the appointment of the cabinet as a "positive step," but said he would withhold final judgment until the Palestinian government's approach to militant groups becomes clear. Maariv reported that Vice Premier Shimon Peres congratulated Qurei and PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas over the formation of the cabinet.

Jerusalem Post quoted Arie Sintronovich, chairman of the northern West Bank settlement of Mevo Dotan, as saying he is convinced that 90 percent of the residents of his community want to be compensated and evacuated from the territories. Mevo Dotan is not one of the West Bank settlements to be evacuated under the disengagement plan.

Leading media cited an announcement by the Syrian government Thursday that Damascus was ready to work with the UN to implement Security Council Resolution 1559 demanding a full withdrawal of its 14,000 troops from Lebanon. No date was given. Israel Radio cited Israel's satisfaction over the announcement, and quoted GOI sources as saying that Israel supports the implementation of Resolution 1559, including the disarming of Hizbullah.

Leading media reported that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz ordered senior defense officials on Sunday to prepare a shortened timetable for implementing the disengagement plan, saying, "Eight weeks is too long." Yediot revealed that the GOI is planning a building boom in the West Bank, including authorizing 120 illegal outposts that the U.S. demands that Israel dismantle. Ha'aretz reported that the heads of the Nir Yeshiva in Kiryat Arba (next to Hebron) told settler leaders on Thursday that their yeshiva will soon move to Sa-Nur, one of the four northern West Bank settlements slated to be evacuated under the disengagement plan.

Hatzofe reported that Palestinian incitement has decreased in the media, but that it has remained the same in the mosques.

Ha'aretz (English Ed.) reported that Brian Avery, an American activist in the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), who was wounded in the face by gunfire in Jenin in April 2003, arrived in Israel on Thursday to submit a High Court petition demanding that the Israeli military authorities investigate the incident.

In an account of her second visit to the Guantanamo Bay detention facility in a year and a half, Yediot Washington correspondent Orly Azolai presents cases of alleged abuse.

Yediot reported that the U.S. Embassy to Israel will make it easier for Israelis to obtain U.S. visas: during the coming two months, applicants will be able to come to the Embassy on their own, not only through travel agencies. Maariv cited a press release issued by the U.S. Embassy on Thursday: "Beat the peak-season rush; apply early for nonimmigrant visas to the U.S."

Yediot reported that for the first time, Jewish and Christian groups in ten countries, including the U.S., will celebrate an "International Israel Day" on Israel's Independence Day [May 12].

Leading media note that PM Sharon will turn 77 on Sunday.

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1. Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "[In Brussels,] Bush spoke of the importance of territorial contiguity for Palestinians in the West Bank.... Bush's words are at odds with Sharon's map of the [West Bank separation] fence in Ariel and Ma'aleh Adumim."

Diplomatic correspondent Alexander Maistrovoy wrote in popular, pluralist Russian-language Novosty Nedely: "Israel will most likely have to accept the peace parameters proposed by the U.S., which would nonetheless be much more favorable than before, since they would include the neutralization of Syria, Hizbullah, and Hamas."

Block Quotes:  
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I. "Bush's Contiguity"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (February 25): "[In Brussels,] Bush spoke of the importance of territorial contiguity for Palestinians in the West Bank. 'A state of scattered territories will not work,' he said. His speechwriters sought to correct remarks made by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in the Senate, who

SIPDIS spoke of 'Palestinian contiguity,' without offering details. Her statement raised a wave of criticism from the American Jewish right: if Palestine is contiguous, and the West Bank is linked to Gaza, then Israel will be split into parts. Bush was compelled to explain that this was not the intention. Bush's words are at odds with Sharon's map of the [West Bank separation] fence in Ariel and Ma'aleh Adumim. The two largest settlements are also 'contiguity breakers' between parts of the West Bank, which is why the Americans were against having them included within the confines of the fence. Officials in Sharon's office insist that the route was presented to the Americans last summer, and was accepted without comment. The Foreign Ministry believes that the argument is far from over."

II. "The White House's 'New Course'"

Diplomatic correspondent Alexander Maistrovoy wrote in popular, pluralist Russian-language Novosty Nedely (February 25): "The President of the U.S. has said that achieving peace in [the Middle East] ranks first among the United States' priorities worldwide. This new ... course of the White House marks a significant departure from George W. Bush's previous term in office.... The latest Bush speech, it would seem, marks a turning point in U.S. foreign policy. From now on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict takes top priority in the United States' strategy, and its resolution is a primary task. ... Like every president, George Bush is trying to use his second term to realize his vision for the balance of power in the world. Creating a new Middle East has become Bush's enormous task after 9/11; he will fully devote his attention to it during the next four years. According to President Bush and his advisors, the Middle East has to reinvent itself, from a hotbed for despotic regimes, corruption, and Islamic fanaticism, into if not an oasis of democracy, at least a stable region with predictable ... pro-Western regimes and comparatively friendly populations. The feasibility of this task is another question, but it is well known that the more difficult a task, the more attractive it is.... The White House believes that in the event of success with both the Iraqi experiment and the Palestinian one, a new dynamic will appear in the Middle East and change the face of the region.... Clearly, the U.S. will insist on the establishment of a sustainable Palestinian state ... and strive for the final resolution of the conflict.... Israel will most likely have to accept the peace parameters proposed by the U.S., which would nonetheless be much more favorable than before, since they would include the neutralization of Syria, Hizbullah, and Hamas."

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2. Iran: Nuclear Program:  
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Summary:  
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Editor-in-Chief David Horovitz wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Underpinning that premature hysteria of 10 days ago [when a mysterious detonation occurred near the Bushehr nuclear reactor] is the fact that there is only one answer to the question of whether Israel is reconciled to a nuclear Iran. And the answer is no."

Block Quotes:  
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"Iran: The Moment of Truth"

Editor-in-Chief David Horovitz wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (February 25): "For a few frenzied hours on February 16, TV news shows worldwide carried hysterical reports of an apparent attack on an Iranian nuclear facility, with speculation focusing primarily on the U.S. and secondarily on Israel as the responsible party. Only hours earlier, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom had asserted that Tehran would have the know-how to build a nuclear bomb within six months. Within a very short time, the reports were being corrected.... The panic, plainly, was over. Except that the panic isn't over. It was merely premature. The moment of truth hasn't yet arrived. But it's not far off now.... Under the outdated 1960s rules on non-proliferation, nations can legitimately get exceptionally close to nuclear arms -- three weeks to three months from the bomb. That's where Japan is right now.... Iran is the most dangerous beneficiary of this untenable state of affairs.... Iran is clearly not solely an Israeli problem, and Israel can derive no benefit from expropriating it. The fact is that if Iran goes nuclear, the Middle East goes nuclear because other countries jump in. The 1960s nuclear order goes down the tubes altogether and the world becomes a hugely more dangerous place.... Underpinning that premature hysteria of 10 days ago is the fact that there is only one answer to the question of whether Israel is reconciled to a nuclear Iran. And the answer is no."

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